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the leaders of organizations as well as seizing their assets.

After the leaders of Operation UNITE and Appalachia HIDTA met to discuss the problem of prescription diversion, it became apparent that the tactics used in the past were ineffective and a new way to attack the problem was needed. It was decided that members of Operation UNITE would join forces with members of two AHIDTA task forces, one located in Hazard and the other in London, Ky. The UNITE officers would work the cases from the street-level perspective, identifying the DTOs and would then work hand-in-hand with AHIDTA agents to take the investigation to its source, thereby taking down the entire organization as a whole. The heads of the organizations would then be prosecuted in U.S. District Court and the lower level operators would be prosecuted in state court.

This new approach began in late 2011 and has already realized many substantial successes. Several large scale operations have been dismantled, some including health care providers as well as clinic owners and dozens of street-level dealers. Some of these criminals are serving jail time and their assets have been converted to funds to continue to fight the prescription drug problem. It is believed that continued cooperation between the federal, state and local officers is the most effective way to stop the unnecessary deaths that are plaguing our state. ■

KENTUCKY JOINS PROGRAM TO SHARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG DISPENSING DATA WITH OTHER STATES

STAFF REPORT | GOVERNOR'S COMMUNICATION OFFICE

Kentucky will sign an agreement to share and receive prescription drug dispensing data with at least 20 states, which will help the state monitor prescription drug abuse, Gov. Steve Beshear announced in March.

The Kentucky All Schedule Prescription Electronic Reporting program has joined the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy's Prescription Monitoring Program InterConnect, which facilitates the transfer of information to authorized users in other states. Specifically, the PMP InterConnect links participating programs to provide a more effective means of combating drug diversion and drug abuse nationwide.

PMP InterConnect enhances the benefits of the KASPER system by providing the means for Kentucky prescribers and pharmacists to more easily identify patients with prescription drug abuse and misuse problems, especially if that patient is crossing state lines to obtain those drugs. Kentucky law enforcement and regulatory agencies will have access to the information, as well, to assist in the investigation of illegal drug abuse and diversion of controlled substances across state lines.

"The reality is drug abusers and diverters are not obtaining these drugs only in Kentucky, and we need tools that provide a broader understanding of where and when drugs are being obtained," said CHFS Inspector General Mary Begley. "We are very excited to join the PMP InterConnect and look forward to the rewards of this partnership."

"KASPER — as well as all other states' prescription monitoring programs — would be more effective if data included all controlled substance prescriptions for a patient regardless of the state in which they were dispensed," said Dave Hopkins, coordinator of the KASPER program. "In fact, this is something our KASPER users have asked for and overwhelmingly support."

The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy is paying for all costs associated with the development and implementation of the PMP InterConnect, as well as five years of annual fees for each participating state prescription drug monitoring program.

Kentucky hosted the first meeting of a new Interstate Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force recently. The task force is composed of representatives from Kentucky, Ohio, West Virginia and Tennessee and includes representatives from government, law enforcement, health care and advocacy groups. The group is developing ways states can work together to choke off the so-called "pill pipeline" of illegal prescription drugs streaming into those states from the south. ■